

ONTARIO D/F

Who gives a damn?

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ONTARIO

The beautiful spots nature gave us are fast running out.

Sure we have hundreds of square miles of virgin land. But try to get there without driving for hours. And when you do arrive, it's wild all right, but not very hospitable.

We need green places. Great stands of trees. Clear, clean water. We need them for ourselves and our kids. We need them close to where we live.

It's so easy to go along with this idea. But who cares enough to *act*, so we can keep those natural green places?

This was a question the Ontario Government asked itself thirty years ago. There were other questions, too. Not then so publicly dramatic, but as it turned out, very important for now.

All the questions turned on one single word: water.

Once we had more clean clear water than we knew what to do with. Almost surrounded by the Great Lakes and with 17 percent of the province steeped in water, Ontario seemed rich.

Three things changed the picture. First, the Great Lakes (and many others) became polluted. Second came a marked increase in spring floods, which meant that dry beds began to appear in summer. Third, a fantastic increase in the demand for water.

Ontario passed its first Conservation Authorities Act in 1946. It was sharpened and brought up to date two years ago.

The act is rooted in three principles.

The drive for a conservation authority must come from the local people.

The most important factor on which all conservation must turn is the natural water system.

If local people show initiative, the government will support them with technical advice and money.

Because of its citizen involvement, the Act is unique in North America. Until a short time ago, it was unique in the world. It's been pored over and praised by all manner of foreign governments. That's fine on paper, but does the citizen/government idea work in practice?

The very marvel of the Conservation Authorities movement is the number of ordinary citizens involved and the sustained energy they put into it.

Right now there are 37 Authorities in Ontario. They look after over 30,000 square miles of land and water. There are about 900 representatives from 561 municipalities involved. They devote a great deal of their private time to conservation.

How is an Authority set up?

First, there has to be a good reason for conserving the area: water conservation, flood control, forests, soil erosion, wild life preservation or public recreation. Next, there must be local interest. Any two municipalities in the same area can approach the Minister of Energy and Resources Management and request an exploratory meeting. The Minister

then asks every village, town and city in the area to send representatives to talk about the formation of an Authority. After thorough discussion, the meeting votes. If two thirds of the representatives vote yes, the Minister gets an Order-in-Council to set up the Authority.

Once it's established, everybody's in on it, even those municipalities who may have voted no. **Where does the money come from for a conservation program?**

The Authority apportions the costs of its share among the municipalities. The costs are based on population, assessment or benefit. The province pays grants of up to 75% of the costs. In some cases, the province pays the full shot.

Every Authority is a body separate from government. But they all lean heavily on the Conservation Branch of the Department of

Energy and Resources Management. Massive technical help is there. There are engineers on staff, forestry experts, biologists, planners, recreational specialists, even historians on tap. There are also men, sympathetic but sharp-eyed, whose job it is to see your tax dollars are being spent the way they should be.

It's hard, painstaking work for both the Authorities and our branch. But it produces results you can see for yourself: all over Ontario, green and natural places from water that's clean and clear.

So if you're unhappy about what's happening to certain places close to where you live and want to save them, do something. Start talking to your service club, church group or business friends. Get some support. Take it to your local council. Tell them what you want, and why.

It can be done. Ask any of the 900 people of the 37 Authorities we've got right now. They'll tell you it can work, with a little help.

And you know where to get that help, don't you?

Write or call:

Information Services,
880 Bay Street,
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Telephone: (416) 365-7117.

